

Giant Hogweed

Heracleum mantegazzium

Status in MA: Introduced. Found in 6 counties.

Habitat: Disturbed habitats, roadsides, vacant lots, and along streams and rivers. It prefers rich, moist soil in semi-shade conditions.

Distinguishing features:

- Grows to be 9-15 feet in height.
- Stems are 2-4 inches in diameter, hollow, ridged, and covered with coarse hairs and dark reddish-purple splotches.
- Leaves have three leaflets that are sharply and coarsely lobed. The lower surface of the leaflet looks scaly.
- Largest leaves may reach 5 feet in width.
- Flowers grow in large white flat-topped clusters that may reach 2 ½ feet in width.
- Dead stems remain upright during the winter.

Cow parsnip

Heracleum maximum

Status in MA: Native. Found in every county in MA and throughout the Northeast.

Habitat: Roadsides, waste places, woodland borders, and meadows.

Distinguishing features:

- Grows to be 3-8 feet in height
- Stems are 2 inches in diameter, covered with fuzzy hairs and few or no purple spots.
- Leaves have three leaflets that are coarsely lobed with a fuzzy underside.
- Leaves are smaller than giant hogweed.
- Flowers grow in flat-topped clusters that are 4-12 inches wide.

Similarities

- Large, white, compound umbels.
- Large, trifoliate, highly dissected leaflets.
- Grow to several feet in height.
- Both can cause skin irritation although cow parsnip causes a less severe reaction.

Differences

- The purple pigmentation on the stem of cow parsnip does not scrape off.
- The hairs on the stem on cow parsnip are fine/fuzzy rather than coarse like stubble from not shaving.
- The underside of the leaf of cow parsnip is covered with fuzzy white hairs. The underside of a giant hogweed leaf looks smooth and scaly. Hairs, which may not be visible to the naked eye, are coarse.

For comparisons with other similar species see:

Giant Hogweed and Similar Species- Massachusetts Dept. of Agriculture

http://www.state.ma.us/dfa/pestalert/giant_hogweed_photos.htm

Giant Hogweed and Look-A-Likes by D. Lingenfelter and W. Curran, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, Penn State University, University Park, PA 16802

<http://weeds.cas.psu.edu/hogweed.pdf>

Symptoms of skin irritation from Giant Hogweed sap

Furocoumarins in the clear, watery sap of the Giant Hogweed plant cause a skin reaction known as phytophotodermatitis (“phyto”= relating to a plant, “photo”= light, and “dermatitis” = skin irritation). The furocoumarins cause the skin to become hypersensitive to sunlight resulting in a burn. This is not an allergic reaction like allergic dermatitis from poison ivy. The initial symptoms of phytophotodermatitis arise within 24 hours of exposure to the sap and include itchiness, redness, heat, swelling, and blistering that may last days, weeks, or months. Excessive pigmentation of the affected skin may persist for a year or more.

Giant Hogweed Dos and Don'ts

DON'T touch or handle plants using your bare hands! Prevent skin contact by wearing protective clothing such as gloves, long sleeves, long pants, hats, and protective eyewear.

DON'T allow children to play in hogweed. They may sometimes use the long, hollow stems for telescopes, peashooters, or swords.

DON'T transplant Giant Hogweed, plant its seeds or give away plants or seeds

DO wash immediately with soap and water if hogweed sap contacts your skin.

DO report locations of any Giant Hogweed plants, using the HOGWEED HOTLINE number 617 626-1779; or you can report them online

http://www.state.ma.us/dfa/pestalert/giant_hogweed_report.htm

HOW TO I.D. POISON IVY AND DISTINGUISH FROM SIMILAR PLANTS

Poison ivy, Climbing poison ivy

Toxicodendron radicans

Status in MA: Native. Found in all MA counties.

Habitat: Open woods, roadsides, stone walls, sand dunes, around buildings, trees, and fences.

Distinguishing features:

- Vigorous, rope-like, hairy, perennial vine that can grow as a creeper or a small shrub.
- “Leaves of three, let it be”
- Leaves grow in clusters of 3 leaflets that are 2-4” in length. The middle leaflet has a stem that is longer than the side leaflets.
- Leaflets are dull or glossy green at maturity with irregularly toothed, smooth, or lobed edges.
- Flower and fruit arise in the angle between the leaf and twig.
- Flowers are greenish in spring.
- The fruits are in cluster of off-white or pale yellow-green berries that remain on plant through the winter.

Poison ivy, Creeping or Western Poison ivy

Toxicodendron rydbergii

Status in MA: Native. Found in 6 counties in MA.

Habitat: same as *T. radicans*

Distinguishing features:

- Bushy variant of *T. radicans*

- *T. radicans* and *T. rydbergii* are very similar in form (and ability to elicit a rash) except *T. rydbergii* lacks aerial roots (doesn't look like a hairy rope growing up a tree)

Virginia Creeper

Parthenocissus quinquefolia

Status in MA: Native. Found in all counties in MA.

Habitat: Woodlands, roadsides, and waste places.

Distinguishing features:

- 5 leaflets radiating from a central stem
- Fast-growing, climbing vine that attaches itself with tendrils with disc-like tips
- Flowers are tiny and inconspicuous
- Fruit are blue-black berries, less than ½" across

HOW TO DISTINGUISH POISON SUMAC FROM OTHER SIMILAR PLANTS

Poison sumac

Toxicodendron vernix

Status in MA: Native. Found in all MA counties

Habitat: Wooded swamps, pond and stream margins

- Tall shrub or tree with pale gray bark, 5-15 feet in height
- Each leaf has 5-13 leaflets 3-4" long and 1-2" wide.
- Leaflets are dark green on the top and light green on the bottom with smooth edges.
- The stalk of the leaf of poison sumac is often a bright red or maroon color.
- Fruits of poison sumac are whitish, shiny, hairless, and borne in drooping branched clusters.

The nonpoisonous sumacs

Shining sumac, Winged sumac

Rhus copallinum

Status in MA: Native. Found in all MA counties

Habitat: Thickets, fields, and openings.

Smooth sumac

Rhus glabra

Status in MA: Native. Found in all MA counties

Habitat: Thickets, fields, and openings.

Staghorn sumac

Rhus hirta

Status in MA: Native. Found in all MA counties.

Habitat: Fields, roadsides, thickets, woodland borders.

- Tall shrub or small tree
- The edges of the leaflets on staghorn (or smooth) sumac have teeth. (Winged sumac is the exception to this.)
- Fruit of staghorn (or smooth or winged) sumac are dark red, covered with short hairs, and borne in crowded upright clusters.
- The stalk of the leaf of staghorn (or smooth) sumac is green.
- The stalk of the leaf of winged sumac has "wings".

Similarities

- Compound leaves with many leaflets.
- Shrub or a small tree.

Differences

- Color of the leaf stalk.
- Type of fruit.
- Edges of the leaflets.
- Found in different habitats.

Poison oak

Toxicodendron pubescens

NOT FOUND IN MASSACHUSETTS

Symptoms of poison ivy

Poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac are the single most common cause of allergic contact dermatitis in the United States affecting 40-60 million Americans a year. All are members of the Anacardiaceae (Anna-cardy-ACE-ee-yee) (Cashew Family) which includes familiar species such as cashew, mango, and ginkgo. Urushiol (you-ROO-shee-ohl) is a colorless or pale yellow oil released from the plant when cut, crushed, or burned. It turns black when exposed to air making it easier to see. Urushiol is present in the stems, roots, leaves, flowers, and fruits, and stays in the plant year round. The plant can still cause a rash when dormant or for years after it is dead. You can be exposed to urushiol from (1) direct contact with a cut or crushed plant, (2) indirect contact (e.g. tool or pet fur that has contacted poison ivy), or (3) airborne urushiol (e.g. from burning poison ivy plants). At least 50% of the population is sensitive to the urushiol in poison ivy sap.

Poison ivy rash is an immune response triggered by the urushiol in the sap of the plants. Sensitivity to poison ivy develops after the first contact with urushiol. Most people won't react to poison ivy on their first exposure but will develop a reaction on their second and subsequent exposures. The course of the reaction runs something like this. The area touched with the plant becomes red. Bumps and blisters appear accompanied by itching and sometimes swelling. After several days they reach their peak, begin to crust over, and disappear. Over the counter preparations (e.g. calamine lotion), cool showers, and lukewarm baths with oatmeal or baking soda can be used to ease the symptoms of poison ivy. **If the symptoms are severe (some of the population is extremely sensitive to poison ivy), on a sensitive area of the body (e.g. face or genital area), or the plants have been ingested, seek medical advice.**

Poison Ivy Myths

Poison Ivy rash is contagious.

Once the urushiol has been removed from your skin, neither you nor another person will develop symptoms from touching the affected area.

You can catch poison ivy simply by being near the plants.

Plants need to be crushed or burned to release the oils.

Do not worry about dead plants.

The urushiol in the plant sap can remain reactive for years.

Scratching blisters will spread the rash.

Blister fluid does not contain urushiol and therefore is not contagious.

I've been in poison ivy many times and never broken out. I'm immune.

Once allergic to poison ivy, always allergic to poison ivy.

Sensitivity to poison ivy can change throughout your lifetime. 50-85% of people will develop a poison ivy reaction upon repeated exposure to the plant. 15% of the population is resistant to developing a poison ivy reaction.

What to do (and not to do) about poison ivy

DO

Recognize and avoid contact with the plants or objects contaminated with the oil from the plants (e.g. tools, clothing, pet's fur).

Wear long pants, long sleeves, boots, and gloves if you need to be in an area where poison ivy grows.

Wash skin exposed to poison ivy with a mild soap and water ASAP. Washing thoroughly with water up to two hours after exposure can decrease the severity of a reaction.

Clean all contaminated tools and clothing.

Keep pets out of poison ivy.

Control poison ivy in areas around your home where children or pets could come into contact with it.

DON'T

Burn plants to dispose of them.

Use latex (rubber) gloves to remove plants. The oils can penetrate latex.

References:

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http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/pubs/fsheet_faq_notice/fs_phhgweed.pdf

Best Management Practices: Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)
<http://www.townofsalemnh.org/pdf/Hogweed.pdf>

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Parthenocissus quinquefolia (Virginia Creeper) on Floridata

http://www.streetside.com/plants/floridata/ref/p/parth_q.htm

Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac Information Center

<http://www.poisonivy.us/>

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http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/796_ivy.html

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Technical Information About *Heracleum mantegazzianum* (Giant Hogweed)

Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/plants/weeds/aqua012.html>

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